

VZCZCXRO6707
PP RUEHBC RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHLH RUEHPW RUEHROV
DE RUEHRH #0628/01 0861638
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 271638Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4867
INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 8523
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RIYADH 000628

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

LONDON FOR TSOU, PARIS FOR ZEYA
DEPT FOR NEA/ARP (WALKER, SHUKAN, JACHIM), INL, DRL
(LURIE), INR (TOMLYANOVICH, AL-RAHIM) PRM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2017
TAGS: [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: SAUDI TEXTBOOKS DISPLAY REDUCED INTOLERANCE;
PROBLEMS REMAIN

REF: A. APRIL 17 2006 INR REPORT SAUDI ARABIA: RELIGIOUS
IDENTITY AND SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS (20160413)
[1](#)B. JUNE 12 2006 DRL/IRF MEMCON
[1](#)C. 2006 RIYADH 09088
[1](#)D. 2007 RIYADH 00397

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Post conducted a review of six 2006-2007 textbooks used in Saudi schools for the second, fourth, and eighth grades. The six textbooks do not advocate any particular philosophy toward non-Muslims, and on the whole, appear to be more tolerant than previously reviewed textbooks. Two of the six textbooks do not mention non-Muslims at all, while the other four textbooks specifically mention Christians, Jews, and by implication, Shi'a. However, in only a few instances are there negative references to non-Muslims. New language in one textbook emphasizes that Muslims should hate the concept of polytheism instead of the individual polytheist. Only one textbook contains overtly intolerant language that says Muslims should hate all non-believers regardless of sect or religion. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

[1](#)2. (C) Post previously reviewed SAG-approved textbooks in 2000 and 2003. INR reviewed academic year 2003 textbooks (ref A), and Freedom House released a report on Saudi textbooks in 2006. All of these analyses indicated the inclusion of intolerant language in textbooks. Post recently "borrowed" several 2006-2007 textbooks from Saudi students and reviewed them to determine the SAG's progress in removing intolerant language. (NOTE: Post has repeatedly requested textbooks through official channels; however, the SAG has failed to respond to these requests. END NOTE.) Six textbooks were reviewed: second grade intermediate, Hadith; fourth grade, Affirming God's Oneness and Islamic Jurisprudence; fourth grade, Biography of Prophet Mohammad's Life; eighth grade, Fiqh Rites and Transactions; eighth grade, Affirming God's Oneness, by Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdul Wahab; and eighth grade, Qur'anic Exegesis. All six textbooks were published by the Educational Development

Department of the Education Ministry. "Affirming God's Oneness" was written by the founder of the Wahhabi school of the Hanbali legal tradition. The authors of the other five books were not indicated. Only one textbook (fourth grade, Biography of Prophet Mohammad's Life) had been reviewed by the Review and Development Committee (ref B).

REVIEW RESULTS

¶3. (C) The second grade intermediate textbook, Hadith, quotes two controversial hadiths. The first hadith says "the strongest elements of Islamic belief are loving for God's sake and hating for God's sake," and the text explains that Muslims should hate infidels regardless of their type or sect. The book says that this hate should be "hidden in the heart," but that hating infidels does not require a Muslim to be unfair to, harm, physically attack, or take property or money away from them. The book also says that a Muslim can sell to or buy from a non-Muslim and indicates that Muslims should encourage non-Muslims to embrace Islam. The second hadith claims that Jewish women have corrupted Jewish society because they are encouraged to work outdoors and are used to "seduce and corrupt men."

¶4. (C) The fourth grade textbook, Affirming God's Oneness and Islamic Jurisprudence, defines a "true Muslim," including what a true Muslim should not do. The book discusses the beliefs and behaviors of errant Muslims, as well as those of non-Muslims. This book contains fewer condemnations of non-Muslims than previous editions and no longer overtly teaches that Muslims should fight or take property from

RIYADH 00000628 002 OF 003

explains the opening verse of the Koran, the Surat Al-Fateha, as stating that God is angry with Jews because they do not follow the religious rules in their holy books. The textbook also states that God considers Christians as having gone astray because they worship God without knowledge of the correct rules.

¶5. (C) The fourth grade history textbook, Biography of Prophet Mohammad's Life, outlines Mohammad's life in Mecca and Medina, including mention of three battles against the infidels. It says Muslims should hate the infidel's beliefs and behavior, not the individual infidel. It mentions the battle of Al-Khandaq in which Jews broke their alliance with Mohammad and supported his enemies.

¶6. (C) The eighth grade textbook, Fiqh Rites and Transactions, does not mention non-Muslims.

¶7. (C) In the eighth grade textbook, Affirming God's Oneness, Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdul Wahab, the founder of Wahhabism, warns against polytheism, giving examples of Jews who failed to conform to the teachings of God because they believed in and followed magicians, idol worshippers, and the devil. The textbook also talks about Jews who supported non-Muslims against Muslims although they knew that the Muslims were right and the non-Muslims were wrong. Unlike previous editions, this textbook states that God will punish any Muslim who does not literally obey God just as God punished some Jews by turning them into pigs and monkeys. The book cites a hadith in which Mohammad told Muslims to follow his teachings literally, warned Muslims against imitating non-Muslims, and prophesied that Muslims would one day imitate non-Muslims in matters of religion and behavior. The book also states that Muslims should love true Muslims, and in order to win God's love, hate Muslims and non-Muslims who sin or who do not love God.

¶8. (C) The eighth grade textbook, Qur'anic Exegesis, contains excerpts from 52 chapters of the Qur'an. It does not mention Christians or Jews in particular. However, the book states that God punishes people who do not believe in the prophets, which by implication includes Christians and

Jews because they do not believe in the Prophet Mohammad. Unlike textbooks used in the past, this textbook does not emphasize that God continues to punish Jews because they disobeyed God during the time of Moses and his successors.

CONFLICTING DEADLINES

¶9. (C) SAG officials have stated repeatedly that all textbooks will be reviewed and revised to ensure that they do not promote hatred, violence, or intolerance. However, there has been no consistency in statements about how long it will take to complete this process. On June 7, 2006, Education Minister Abdullah bin Saleh Al-Obaid told U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Hanford that the process would take two more years to complete (ref B). A November 2005 report issued by the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington, D.C. entitled Summary of Saudi Arabia's Comprehensive Program to Revise the Kingdom's National Educational Curriculum, stated that the SAG Education Ministry has a ten-year strategic plan to remove intolerant material from textbooks. On November 15, 2006, SAG Islamic Affairs Minister Sheikh Saleh bin Abdul Aziz bin Mohammed Al-Sheikh told Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism (APHSCT) Frances Fragos Townsend that a special commission and the Islamic

RIYADH 00000628 003 OF 003

Affairs Ministry are "slowly moving forward and have already corrected many textbooks (ref C)." Al-Sheikh did not say when this process would be completed. On December 4, 2006, Assistant Deputy Education Minister for Research and Educational Studies Dr. Al Khabti told the U.S.-KSA Strategic Dialogue's Human Development Working Group that the SAG had established in committees in all the provinces to review the KSA's educational system's 572 textbooks (ref D). He anticipated that it would take two to three years to rewrite the texts and complete the project.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) The SAG has slowly and inconsistently begun to review and revise textbooks to adjust the emphasis from judging, condemning, and attacking non-Muslims and errant Muslims to focusing on one's personal relationship with God and emphasizing tolerance and moderation. Nonetheless, Muslims believe that Islam is not only a complete way of life that will always be the final word, but also a detailed history that true Muslims are supposed to know and emulate. Any textbook that discusses religion must teach what is written in the Qur'an and Hadith (the sayings and behavior modeled by Mohammad). To deviate from these texts or from the customs of model behavior (sunna) is considered innovation (bid'a), which is particularly controversial for Wahhabis. By definition, Muslims are taught to believe that they are superior to non-Muslims, including Christians and Jews.

¶11. (C) Saudi Arabia is also home to Islam's two holiest cities -- Mecca and Medina -- so Saudis feel a special obligation to teach and enforce a stricter, purer form of Islam. Many believe that God holds them to a higher standard and that they must ensure virtue is promoted and vice is punished. Consequently, textbooks are meant to prepare Saudis to fulfill their special role as custodians of the Two Holy Mosques and defenders of the faith. In that context, textbook reform embodies the fundamental problem the SAG faces in forwarding many of its reforms. In trying to create a more liberal, modern Saudi society that is in keeping with international human rights standards and conventions, the SAG's efforts often inherently conflict with deeply held religious beliefs. END COMMENT.
OBERWETTER